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ABSTRACT

Riddles designed to measure Spanish-English bilingualism are presented. The riddles are given in three forms: (1) the background material in English with the answer required in Spanish, (2) the background material and answers in English, and (3) only answers given, either in English or Spanish. The riddles are useful as classroom language exercises, and provide opportunities for practicing both oral and reading comprehension. When the answer-only format is used, they function as stimuli for conversation or writing. 9 sample riddles are presented. (RW)

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Picked-Pict: A Multi-purpose Echo Riddle

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When attending the TESOL conference in New York in 1976, I was entertained and amused by a series of playful tests designed to determine an individual's degree of bilingualism in English and Spanish. These appeared in the newsletter published each day of the conference.

More than seven years have passed. Since that time my Mexican-educated sons and I have been competing with one another; inspired by these earlier tests, we have devised our own to measure bilingualism. Ours consist of the riddles that follow. These have served particularly well to break the monotony during long trips we have made between Chiapas and Michoacán.

Yet, more important for an English teacher's needs, some of these simpler samples, I have found, when used in the classroom, can exercise both oral and reading comprehension. Further, when only answers are given, they function as stimuli either for conversation or writing.

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The difficult ones given here are for the befuddlement of more sophisticated readers.

I am going to present our riddles in three forms:

1. The background material is given in English, and the answer is required in Spanish.

2. The background material and answers are in English.

3. Only answers are given, either in English or Spanish; the

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background material is to be supplied in English.

In all cases, the answer must consist of a word or expression repeated as in the title above, similar to the well-known "Traje traje" and "Nada nada" combinations. The spelling of the words or expressions that are repeated need not be identical, but it is preferable that their pronunciation be recognizably alike.

1. English-Spanish.

Pepe's English teacher asked all of her pupils to turn in lists of irregular verbs with their forms in the past tense. However, the paper that Pepe handed in appeared blank. She asked him why he hadn't written the verbs. Upon which, Pepe, whose pockets were bulging with limes, answered, "_____."

Aurora Babb is talking with her travel agent about a tour she wants to make of South American capitals. She has included five of these, but the agent explains that their package tour includes only four. Aurora, disappointed, but flexible, says, "_____."

Manuel was oiling the wheels of his bicycle. His girlfriend, who had extremely curly hair, was watching the process. She wanted to know why he was oiling the bicycle. Manuel gave her the following explanation; "_____."

An ancient Argentine farmer who has mortgaged his homestead, now finds that with the constant rise of living costs he can no longer meet mortgage payments. He is discussing this situation, dejectedly, with his son, who lives and works now in the capital. The son reassures him, explaining that he has a well-paying job and can help out. Furthermore, he says, "_____."

Patrick was talking with his ne'er-do-well brother-in-law. He suggested that the latter might try taking on a job for a few days. The youth remarked that such a project did not appeal to him and what he really had in mind was to go to Veracruz and bask in the sun on an Atlantic beach for a while.

Patrick rejoined mordantly in his precise Spanish, "_____.

2. English-English.

(For testing bilingualism the material may be presented in Spanish)

Everyone knows that the famous Lone Ranger was quite absent-minded and not nearly so intelligent as his Indian companion, Tonto. One day he lost his horse, Silver. Therefore he asked Tonto, who was an expert tracker, to help him find the animal. After a brief glance at the ground, the faithful Indian answered in well-measured words, "_____."

A young bicycle repairman, who later became one of the inventors of the airplane, went to the post office. He addressed an employee behind the counter, "Excuse me, I've been expecting a package with bicycle parts. Has it arrived?"

The employee replied, "_____."

Hannibal, who was a phenomenal strategist, had one defect: he had no sense of distance or direction. One day, when he wanted to travel from the north of Africa to the south of Spain with his elephants, he got lost. In order to get his bearings, he had to ask directions of a humble aborigine of that region. The man answered him succintly in English, this being the international language.

"_____."

There was a council of all the Celtic tribes of the British Isles. Many heavily aspirated and palatalized lamentations were heard, as well as harp and bagpipe music that keened the same sentiment. Why? Because a Teutonic tongue had gained ascendency throughout the land. They decided to send a spokesman before King Alfred's court.

The King, perplexed upon hearing the man's complaint, asked him, "But what language would you have chosen?"

The Celt answered him in his wee, dour English, "_____."

3. Answers for stories to be constructed in English.

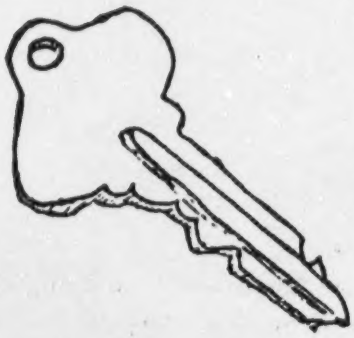
A. In Spanish.

Polc, Polo.
Tuvo tubo.
Barro barro.
Corto corto.
Al asar al azar.
No es nuez.
Es "coces", escocés.

B. In English.

Raise rays.
Pick pick.
Joint joint.
I ran Iran.
So, sow.
Sew so.
Dam it, damn it.

And now invent your own. Try them in French, Gothic, Swahili...



KEY

1. Conjugo con jugo.
   Quito Quito.
   Rechina, rechina.
   Pago pago. (Argentine Spanish)
   Golfo, golfo.

2. Left left.
   Right, Wright.
   Straight strait.
   Picked Pict. (Of course)